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Professor: Mob involved

UD's Block examines crime role in toxics, society

By JOE TRENTO
Staff reporter

Last month, Alan Block testified that America's toxic waste industry is a bastion of organized crime. He named names.

As U.S. Sen. William V. Roth Jr., R-Del., gaveled a close to the hearings of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Block was deluged with queries from the press.

The 42-year-old University of Delaware associate professor looks back on the events with satisfaction: "It is nice being a social scientist and having someone else besides your colleagues interested in what you do."

What Block does, in addition to teaching, is spend his days and nights interviewing politicians, law-enforcement officials, criminals, reporters and everyday people in an effort to learn how organized crime has infiltrated various segments of American life.

He sifts through testimony from old hearings and obscure and yellowed court and criminal records to find new pieces of information.

Block was reading the record of a 1980 House committee hearing on crime and toxic waste when the name Capital Recovery Inc. jumped out at him.

"I saw that 270,000 gallons of toxics had supposedly been

posed of at a downtown Wilmington address, and wondered where the hell this had been hidden."

Block says he hadn't read anything about it in the newspapers or seen any evidence of an investigation.

"So I called the Delaware attorney general's office. . . . Those guys didn't seem to want to do anything. They told me they'd get back to me. Three weeks later when they didn't, I called the paper."

"I can't believe no one in Delaware read the House hearings at all," Block said.

Block and fellow academic Frank Scarpitti, a sociology professor, are researching in preparation to writing "Poisoning For Profit," a book that will detail organized crime's involvement in the toxic industry and the activities of governmental agencies that are supposed to regulate that industry.

In addition to his duties at the university, Block is the researcher for the New York Senate Committee on Crime.

"The committee is very interested in toxics and I think the public will be surprised at the corporate and mob tie-ins that will be exposed in the coming months. . . . People are going to get shocked when they see how much of the country is poisoned and how little we know about it," Block said.

Block has traveled to Denmark

researching American ties to prostitution and narcotics, and to Sicily researching the heroin trail to the United States.

The results have been three published books.

"What people don't understand are the ties between crime and intelligence and the government and crime. . . . Incidents like the CIA going to the Mafia to kill Castro are not without precedent. . . . The government has had a long and sometimes bizarre partnership with organized crime and toxic wastes is just the most recent chapter."

Block said he has found that corporate America and organized crime sometimes need and use one another: "They do the same things and they are structured in the same way. As I said at that hearing, the so-called legitimate corporations turn to organized crime to fill needs, like getting rid of toxic wastes."

Block, born in Brooklyn, said he first got interested in crime while working as a reporter for Radio Pacifica in Los Angeles.

Block got his doctorate at the University of California at Los Angeles. He worked as a researcher for David Wolper, the documentary film producer.

Block, his wife Marcia, and their four children came to Delaware in 1974 and live in Brookside.